

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ACRYLIC PAINTING OF MALLARDS "COMING IN" TAKES TOP HONORS IN 1980-81 "DUCK STAMP" CONTEST

An acrylic painting of a pair of mallard ducks alighting over a foreground of reeds won first place in the 1980-81 Federal "Duck Stamp" competition for Minnesota artist Richard W. Plasschaert on November 8 at the Interior Department in Washington, D.C.

Plasschaert's painting won out over a record 1,362 other entries in the national art contest and elevates him to the prestigious circle of "Duck Stamp" winners. He is presently employed by a Waseca, Minnesota, printing company.

The design will be reproduced on next year's Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp which must be purchased by waterfowl hunters 16 years of age or older. Many stamps are also bought by conservationists interested in habitat preservation and by a growing number of stamp collectors. Revenues from sales of this stamp, popularly called the "Duck Stamp," are used to buy additional wetlands and waterfowl habitat under a program administered by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Plasschaert, 38, who has had no formal art training, works as a "stripper" in the page preparation room of a catalogue printing company in Waseca, a town of 8,000 about 80 miles south of Minneapolis-St. Paul. He prepares and lays out the photos and text that become the final printed pages of the company's publications.

"I'm without words," said Plasschaert, when contacted at his job and told of his first-place win. "I'm going to walk on the ceiling about a minute from now!"

Plasschaert had never entered the Federal "Duck Stamp" contest before. "I haven't done anything for the past 2 months but paint 'duck stamps,' one for the Federal contest and the other for the Minnesota State waterfowl stamp which I just entered."

The artist chose a simple design against a background of medium-blue sky for his entry. "I wanted it simple, thinking that it would have the best chance to win. I chose mallards because they are very common," Plasschaert said. "You've got to make the birds as large as possible without being overbearing, yet you've got to think small and imagine what it will look like as a stamp."

Mallards are the most common and one of the hardiest varieties of ducks, wintering as far north as they can find open water.

Plasschaert is a high school graduate who learned the printing trade on the job and took occasional art courses in night school. He then spent 20 years in the fields of sign painting, landscape and portrait painting, and free-lance commercial art.

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About 4 years ago, he decided to abandon commercial art and divide his time between wildlife art and his job in printing. "I just got sick of the rat race in commercial art and decided it would be wildlife art or nothing." Plasschaert added that he may now become a professional wildlife artist full-time.

His recent landscapes have been exhibited in several Minnesota and New York art galleries, though he now exhibits solely in a St. Paul wildlife art gallery.

Entries in this year's "Duck Stamp" contest increased nearly four-fold over last year's record number of 374, reflecting the increasing interest the general public is showing in the goal of waterfowl habitat protection. The art world, too, has elevated the contest to national prominence as a means of uncovering the talent of previously unknown wildlife artists.

The entries are judged on the basis of immediate visual impact, composition and design, style, lasting first impression, and distinctiveness. Each category is assigned equal weight by a judging panel of five prominent artists and conservationists. Contestants are allowed only one entry.

Minnesota artists swept the contest this year, with David A. Maass of Waterville winning second place and Stuart Ferreira of Edina taking third place. Maass won the 1974-75 contest.

This year's judges included George Harrison, field editor of International Wildlife Magazine and nature editor of Sports Afield Magazine, of Hubertus, Wisconsin; Dr. Robert Meeks, manager of the Winous Point Shooting Club, of Port Clinton, Ohio; James Phillips, correspondent for the Associated Press and columnist for Outdoor Life Magazine, of Washington, D.C.; Mrs. Betty Crystal, chairman of the women's membership division of Ducks Unlimited, Inc., of Jackson, Mississippi; and John Madson, assistant conservation director for Olin Industries in East Alton, Illinois.

Prior to 1949, wildlife artists were commissioned to provide a design for the annual stamp. Since that time, the design has been chosen by a contest open to all artists who are residents or citizens of the United States.

The winner's financial reward is significant. The Federal Government offers no prize, but commercial wildlife art dealers in the past have been eager to market limited edition reprints for the winner.

The competition is the only annual art contest regularly sponsored by the Federal Government. The colorful stamps constitute the longest running, annually issued series of stamps in U.S. revenue or postage stamp history.

Since 1934 when "Duck Stamps" first went on sale, nearly 2.4 million acres of prime waterfowl habitat have been acquired with over \$315 million in revenue (\$198 million from "Duck Stamp" receipts and \$117 million from accelerated wetlands acquisition loan funds). By purchasing the stamps, more than 2.2 million conservationists provide close to \$16.5 million in revenue yearly.

The Interior Department encourages non-hunters who also enjoy wildlife through photography, birdwatching, and other activities to contribute to the U.S. conservation effort by buying a stamp. Next year's \$7.50 issue will go on sale at post offices on July 1, 1980.

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EDITORS: Black and white glossies are available by calling 202/343-8770.

